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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

ON PEACE OPERATIONS

by Carl von Clausewitz

Core Course Essay

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 1997		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE On Peace Operations				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 11	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Editor's Note While seriously contemplating potential paper topics one recent Friday afternoon in the faculty reading room I awoke to the sudden realization that duty hours were long past, and I was alone. Furthermore, someone had left the lights on in the old library stacks, so I proceeded to investigate. Approaching the lighted area, I heard the unmistakable sputtering of fluent German expression, and I recognized several fits of polysyllabic swearing native only to that language. Stepping into the open, I was confronted by a Prussian General Officer in full regalia, circa 1830. He turned on me, and waving a sheaf of papers (bearing the title "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations") shouted "Have you read this?" I pleaded ignorance whereupon he launched into a thirty minute tirade well beyond my limited translation capabilities. Distracted by my glassy stare, the General paused briefly to introduce himself as Carl von Clausewitz. Sensing a culminating point in his remarks, I seized the initiative by inquiring whether he had any written commentary--auf Englisch--on this subject. He handed me a thick stack of papers, and recommenced his verbal assault. While his back was turned, I made good my escape, secure in the knowledge my course two essay was essentially done. Unfortunately 164 years in the hereafter had not improved Clausewitz's writing style, let alone his English. Desperate to meet the requirement, I edited his papers and now submit the following short synopsis of his latest work, which I believe sheds some light on a topic of current concern.

Nothing so stirs the passion of a strategist as a doctrinal debate. While we have, until now, merely observed the doctrinal ferment occurring in the political and military communities of the United States, the development of an apparent consensus compels comment. Several years of no doubt vigorous argument have produced a series of official publications which collectively describe the American approach to the phenomenon of peace operations.¹ These papers appear to represent, in the truest sense, the synthesis of the statesman's intent with the commander's strategic counsel. All that is lacking is a simple, coherent statement of the result, the absence of such a doctrinal conclusion is both puzzling and instructive. Since On War is often cited by the Americans, we feel obliged to return the favor by providing what they now lack: a rendering of their thesis on peace and its operations.

WHAT ARE PEACE OPERATIONS?

The consistent theme throughout American doctrinal publications is that the use of military forces for peace operations reflects the correct subordination of the military instrument to political ends. The restrictions imposed on such military forces in terms of objectives, rules of engagement, and length of employment are the natural consequence of policy, namely that lesser

political ends dictate lesser military means. Thus, the American doctrine implies *that peace operations are a continuation of policy through primarily non-violent, military means.*

We have already argued exhaustively that war is also a continuation of policy through other means. The duality is evident that policy acts in both spheres: war and peace. The American doctrine manipulates the extended spectrum of policy we offered, bending it into a continuum where peace leads to war and thence to peace, with policy guiding the application (or lack thereof) of force and other national means to achieve strategic ends. This doctrinal evolution is attractive in its breadth and coherence. However, it applies a military approach to what the Americans once called “military operations other than war”². We must examine the eventual implications of such an approach for the military instrument.

TWO DISTRACTIONS TO THE AMERICAN DOCTRINE

Two causes combine to distract the American doctrine. One is the intensity of focus on the subordination of war (hence, the military) to policy, the other is a curious lack of alternatives to the use of military forces. The former may stem uniquely from the Anglo-american military culture; the latter is quite obviously a relic of a given historic situation (that is, the aptly named cold war). We will examine each in turn.

DEMONSTRATING AN ABSENCE OF VIOLENCE

By concentrating on military subservience to policy and the necessity to apply limited military means for limited political ends, the American doctrine deviates from the notion that military forces are created, first and foremost, for war. Yes, war is the continuation of policy by other means, war is also *an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will*. At the very root of these statements is the element of violence, which is the very heart of war. The American doctrine extends the military force (a vehicle for the threat of violence) beyond the bounds of war to peace operations. Yet American doctrinal statements on the components for peace operations

describe a variety of environments wherein violence may be lacking, or may be the predominant characteristic. For example, peace enforcement clearly envisions "the use of force or the threat of the use of force."³ Peacekeeping operations, to the contrary, require an existing cease-fire and the consent of the warring parties.⁴

Proponents of the American doctrine will certainly point out that the deployment of American troops explicitly provides the potential for violence in the minds of possible opponents. The overwhelming superiority of these troops is seen as a check on the aspirations of the opposing force, making resistance futile and dominating the opponent's will. Is the American military such a force that at all times, in all cases, the opponent will clearly recognize his inability to contest its operations? Has such a force ever existed and, if so, under what conditions is its appearance most likely?

VIOLENCE & DETERRENCE

Few military forces in the course of history approach the ideal of *a priori* destruction of the opponent's will to fight. At the level of military operations, we find the two most imposing military forces to have been Napoleon's Grande Armée and the modern Wehrmacht of Hitler. Each military force built a combat reputation that at a minimum unnerved opponents, in the end, each only lost that reputation through poorly developed strategic campaigns. Still, in each case, the operations of these forces also engendered popular uprisings (in Spain for the Grande Armée; in Yugoslavia and many other locations for the Wehrmacht) which ignored and overcame their reputation. Delving deeply into history, we believe that the military force which best approached the ideal we seek was the Golden Horde of the Mongol Khanate. Organized as an offensive version of a people in arms, the Horde closely resembled the practice of war in its essential form of unlimited violence. As such, it acquired a combat reputation which forced whole populations

to flee or offer themselves prostrate. Even the Golden Horde finally expended itself, although its reputation far outlived the force which engendered it, eventually entering the collective subconscious of Europe

Thus the logical disconnect in the American doctrine for peace operations becomes clear. The Americans seek to translate a combat reputation into the self-deterrence of its opponents. The most likely path to such a development requires the military capability and political will to pursue war in all its elemental fury. However, the American doctrine eschews such preponderant violence as counterproductive, and seeks instead to deter opposition through the threat of precise and calculated response. Such an approach will succeed only where success is foreordained by the opponent's disinclination to fight, in all cases, it cedes the initiative.

THE INEVITABLE LOSS OF INITIATIVE

The loss of initiative inherent in the American doctrine is a fundamental error which is ripe for exploitation. The unwillingness of a military force to employ violence is a dangerous precedent. The unnatural nature of this concept is apparent in the dilemma it poses for the military commander: it inserts him in the midst of conflict in a foreign land and requires his impartial treatment of the conflicting sides.⁵ Yet, one or both sides will view the American forces as partial, since their introduction will by definition alter the existing relationship between the combatants. Thus the commander is placed on the strategic offensive in that he has "invaded" a foreign country, yet he is also tactically defensive and averse to the application of violence. In this situation, any restraint apparent in his opponents will stem not from the professed superiority of the American forces, but from the corollary component that American forces will avoid prolonged deployment. The opposing forces have the leisure to simply await the evacuation of the American force, or to attempt to hasten it by seizing the initiative with violent acts.

Despite these deficiencies, the American doctrine can implement a policy requirement by creating a peaceful interlude in the midst of conflict. Whether such a policy goal is correct, and whether military forces are the proper tool for such a policy are questions which remain. We now turn to the second distraction to the American doctrine, namely the lack of military alternatives.

THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND MILITARY RAISON D'ÊTRE

The cold war distinctly showed that military forces are a tool of policy in both war and peace. The American emphasis on military preparedness produced armed forces which successfully responded to numerous contingencies while maintaining a level of deterrence against the primary opponent. American victory in the cold war yielded an imbalance where military capability appeared to exceed strategic requirements, while the international environment reproduced the types of minor conflicts which the cold war had previously overshadowed. It is entirely unsurprising that the political leader would turn to the military instrument as a tool in such circumstances.

Military forces are prepared to deploy great distances and operate in harsh conditions. They comprise the means to establish order in fundamentally chaotic environments. They are trained to function under the most demanding aspects of friction, including the existence of another force opposing one's will. Given the high degrees of what is now called "readiness," military forces appear as a swift and certain tool for peace operations.

RECALLING THE ESSENCE OF ARMED FORCES

Yet to arrive at this conclusion, we must abandon the fundamental nature of an armed force, for whenever armed forces are used, *the idea of combat must be present*. All the threads which underlie the creation and deployment of an armed force must relate to this elemental truth: *the soldier exists that he should fight at the right place and at the right time*. We have established that this is the only true basis for a military force, so it is unnatural for doctrine to

depart from it. What, then, accounts for the confusion in the American doctrine? We see the dichotomy arising from the difference between the fundamental nature of the armed force, and the means associated with the creation and maintenance of such a force.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMBAT AND SUPPORT FORCES

In the case of peace operations wholly devoid of the threat of conflict (an ideal case), the nature of the American involvement would most closely resemble what is now termed humanitarian operations. Such deployments take advantage of the natural organizational support apparatus inherent in any military organization to alleviate the suffering of afflicted populations. This support apparatus is necessary for the creation and maintenance of an armed force, but does not comprise the capability for combat which is at the heart of the armed force.

At the most elemental level in peace operations, what the political leader desires to employ are the support services which replace the societal infrastructures (transportation, police, health, government) destroyed or degraded by conflict. The political leader seeks to employ these means to return the affected territory to a point of normalcy from which further conflict would be unlikely. To the extent that some level of violence is possible, thus departing from the ideal case, combat forces must also be deployed to protect the support assets. The greater the level of implied threat, the larger the combat force which must accompany the support assets. Such a logical turn places the armed force on its head: the combat forces exist to defend the support forces.

Note that we have not, at this point, objected to the use of military forces in peace operations. Rather, our investigation simply points out two circumstances which arise out of the American doctrine. First, by emphasizing the subordination of war (and hence the military) to policy, there is a contradiction between the potential for violence and the reality of its

employment. Second, the use of military forces for peace operations is promoted by the nature of secondary characteristics (support assets) which the military possesses, rather than the combat capability inherent in an armed force. Neither of these points, individually, prevents the use of limited military means for a limited political objective. The critical question arises: what are the implications, over time, for an armed force when such uses are codified as doctrine?

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE AMERICAN DOCTRINE?

The implications of the American doctrine are two. First, peace operations require military forces to engage in unnatural acts which undermine the training and combat cohesion of the force; second, by blurring the line between war and peace, peace operations jeopardize the trinity of the people, the commander and the military force, and the government.

EROSION OF COMBAT CAPABILITY

With regard to the first implication, military forces are organisms which either grow or wither. Combat experience permits growth, while realistic training passes along the lessons of combat even as the combat veteran retires from the force. Of the two, combat is the preferred teacher. Peace operations, at the least, interfere with normal training. As a military operation, they lack the necessary threat of violence to be a substitute for war, and may in fact be instructive in poor habits (e.g., restraint, loss of initiative). Only the operations of support assets in peace operations closely resemble their wartime counterparts. While the effects of any individual operation on any individual unit can be corrected, the long term effects on an armed force will be debilitating.

UNDERMINING THE TRINITY

As to the second point, the danger here is already apparent. The people can be exhorted to great misery and tremendous casualties in the armed forces when risking matters of great import. As the Americans learned once before, in Vietnam, the people will not tolerate such suffering in

lesser cases. Peace operations promise lesser risks, in order to assure the people's support. Yet this is a promise without basis, and leads to a loss of civil support when the means exceed the ends (as occurred in Somalia). The repetition of successful peace operations will lead the public to expect military operations without risk, unsuccessful peace operations will lead the public to question the political leader's ability to assess the risks involved. In either case, the paradoxical trinity--people, military, government--is at risk.

REMEDIES LIE OUTSIDE THE AMERICAN DOCTRINE

At this point, we do not profess to have an easy answer to the dilemma of the American doctrine. If those commanders and statesmen who developed it firmly believe in it, and believe peace operations are a continuing requirement, the requirement must be addressed as the unique phenomenon it is, rather than as a special case of military operations. Perhaps the Americans could develop dual-purpose support assets which could deploy alongside the special peace operations forces of allied countries.⁶ Such forces would not lose their edge since their involvement in peace operations more closely resembles that in war. Perhaps the Americans would consider creating a small contingent of dedicated peace operations units, trained for such purposes and equipped with a variety of lethal and non-lethal weapons. We do not claim to have studied this new phenomenon in great detail; we only note where those who have professed to study it have deviated from our original observations on the nature of war.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As we stated once before, *war is a serious means to a serious end*. Limited war is no less serious, since it displays all the fundamental characteristics of war, although the prosecution of war (its means) is limited by the political objectives (its ends). Peace operations, on the other hand, appear to be neither peace nor war. While a military force may conduct successful peace operations--especially where the opponent lacks a violent intent--it always does so at risk to its

very nature The risk grows with the length and repetition of the practice, and may be fatal once solidified as doctrine

War closely resembles a game of cards, in that it is continuously bound up in chance. The statesman and the military commander are most successful when they are aware of the risk involved. If peace operations are a continuation of policy through primarily non-violent, military means, then they too are a gamble. Yet in this game, the gambler (the statesman) has employed the military like a magic talisman which he believes eliminates the peril The risk remains, the more so to the lucky charm than to the better.

¹ These documents constitute a spectrum from the US President's National Security Strategy all the way down to a Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook A complete listing, in hierarchical order, exists in the bibliography Those unfamiliar with terms such as peace operations may look there for explanation

² The removal of this term from the American strategic lexicon is telling. An entire chapter in Joint Publication 30 (1993), *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, discussed joint forces engaged in military operations other than war after that date, the term primarily appears in publications for subordinate (operational or tactical) forces. The later Joint Publication 1 mentions the term once, the National Military Strategy and the National Security Strategy ignore it.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* Washington, DC US Government Printing Office, 1995, p 12

⁴ United States Department of State, *The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations* Washington, DC US Government Printing Office May 1994, p. 4

⁵ According to the Principles for Peace Operations found in the Joint Warfighting Center, *Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations* Ft Morn, VA. Joint Warfighting Center, February 1995 p 8.

⁶ These force packages could include logistics, command and control, intelligence and military police elements, for example

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